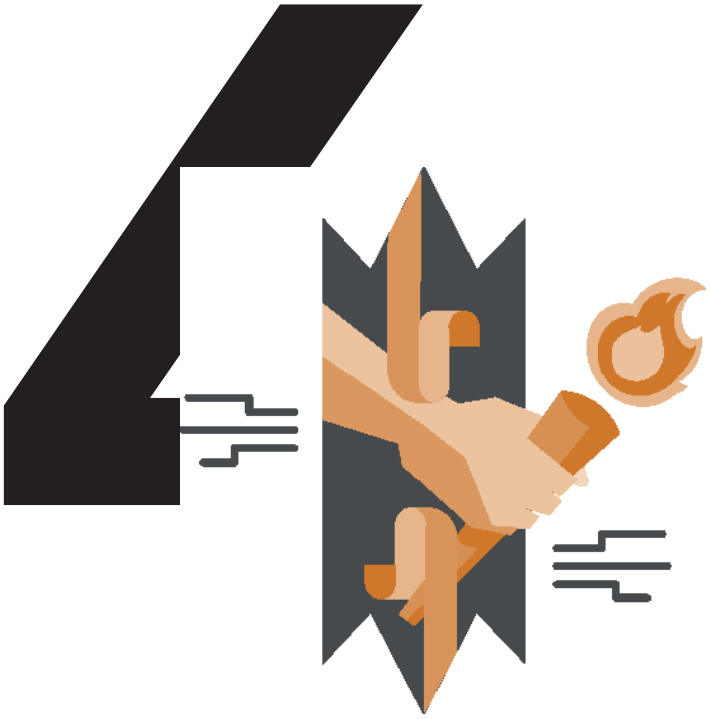


Unit .34

Session .04

Pressing Toward the Goal

Scripture

Philippians 3:7-21

7 But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. **8** More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith. **10** My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, **11** assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead. **12** Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. **13** Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, **14** I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. **15** Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you. **16** In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained. **17** Join in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and pay careful attention to those who live according to the example you have in us. **18** For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame; and they are focused on earthly things. **20** Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. **21** He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Jesus is the greatest treasure and reward.

Remember, this icon means there is a Leader Pack item that goes with the lesson. See Leader Pack for additional instructions.

Option 1

Break your students into three groups. Each group will come up with ideas for "the winning mindset," but each is going to approach that paradigm differently: one group will be good; the second will be bad; the third will be ugly.

The good group should come up with a list of good ways to win. For example, they might state that we should be ready to overcome adversity, to press on, to get creative.

The bad group should come up with a list of bad ways to win: ideas that probably won't work. For example, they might state that we should just wish really hard or count on natural talent.

The ugly group should come up with a list of ugly ways to win: ideas that would work, but would look ugly. For example, they might state that we should cheat, or that we should sabotage the other team, or that we should bully or mess with our opponents.

Let the groups share their ideas for each. Which is the best? Which do people do? Why do they sometimes employ the bad and ugly strategies? As Christians, which should we adopt? In today's session, Paul will compare the Christian life to a race. What are some of the good, bad, and ugly ways we can practice the Christian race? If you have time, you can repeat the exercise, but with a focus on the Christian life instead of athletics.

Option 2

Your students should imagine they are contestants on a new reality TV show called Sabotage Sports. In this show, contestants will play on traditional sports teams: baseball, kickball, track, etc. The difference is that each team is free to sabotage the other team ahead of time; for example, they might sabotage the bases in baseball by filling them with shaving cream, or they might switch out the baseball for a tennis ball so it goes further when they hit it.

Break into small groups and have them come up with two lists of strategies. First, they should come up with a list of sabotage strategies: things they will do to make things harder for the other team. Second, they should come up with a list of response strategies: things they will do to deal with whatever sabotages happen to them. Have students share their lists.

Focus on the second list. How do the teams prepare, both mentally and physically, for the unexpected? In today's session, we'll see how Paul compares the Christian life to a race. As part of that analogy, Paul tells us to lay aside any hindrances. How do the ways we put off hindrances to our Christian growth parallel the preparation we suggested for Sabotage Sports? How should we be prepared for others, our own flesh, and the devil to sabotage our Christian race?

TEACHING PLAN

Read Philippians 3:7-11.

In the previous verses, Paul outlined his impressive Jewish credentials. He was a Benjamite, circumcised according to the Old Covenant, and zealous for the Law. So zealous, in fact, that he persecuted the church and rigidly obeyed the Jewish law. That was his identity. But the gospel re-ordered his priorities and value-system. What was once precious to him, he now considered "dung" compared to knowing Christ (v. 8). Following Jesus came at a great cost for Paul, but no price could surpass the value of Jesus. For Paul, knowing Jesus was so priceless that to lose all things and gain Christ would be no loss at all; indeed, it would only be gain.

- **What have you given up in order to gain something you wanted more?**

How we spend our time, energy, and money shows what we value most. If you treasure good grades, then you stay up late studying extra instead of watching TV or spending time on social media. If you treasure sports, you will spend time, money, and energy practicing. Every time you spend money, you are saying, "I value this thing I want more than I value this money." In all of these examples, you are giving up something of value (time, energy, money) for something that is more precious to you (grades, athletics, food, stuff, etc.).

- **What are some things Paul had to give up in order to know Christ, and how might we have to do the same?**

Paul had to give up his Jewish reputation, and surely along with that, many friendships and the praise associated with being a prominent Jewish leader. He had to give up a life of violence (3:6) and become the object of persecution (v. 10). He had to give up the moral pride that came from his religious commitment. What self-emptying had to take place for Paul to be able to say, "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law?" (v. 9). And so it must be for us. We have to empty ourselves of self-righteousness and moral pride, not trusting in our church background or "Christian family," and instead throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. We must be willing to let go of reputations, friendships, habits, and pursuits that were once precious to us in order to know Christ.

Read Philippians 3:12-14.

Paul had taken the gospel throughout the Roman empire and was writing from prison, but he wasn't complacent or coasting to the finish line. Too often, we can have the attitude that we have "arrived," but Paul taught that we never arrive in this life. Rather, we make every effort to live for Jesus as much as we can now, trusting that because Jesus has "taken hold of" us (v. 12), we will reach the heavenly prize of resurrection.

- **How can we avoid an attitude of spiritual complacency?**

One way that we can fight an attitude of complacency is to stop comparing ourselves to others. It can be easy to look at where you are compared to someone else and think you are doing great. But we must keep our eyes on Jesus. In a 5K or marathon, most runners aren't competing against each other, but against their personal best. Their focus is on their own time, not someone else's. That is how we should be spiritually. We should run the best race we can, focusing on our own progress and the hope of the finish line—not how we are doing compared to someone else.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus is the greatest treasure and reward.

Philippians 3:7-11

"What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance; and this the Christians have, in a way that no other man has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goals can there be than to know God?"[1]

"If we want something *from* God more than we want God *himself*, we should be terrified that God might give us what we want — and withhold himself."[2]

Philippians 3:12-14

Consider the verbs throughout these verses. Paul said to make every effort, take hold, reach forward, and pursue. The Christian life is not passive. We must exert ourselves, with all the power and grace that God supplies, in order to live for Jesus. Jonathan Edwards captured the spirit of this passage when he wrote, "Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live."[3]

1. J.I. Packer, Knowing God (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).
2. Marshall Segal, "When God Withholds Something Good," Desiring God, June 6, 2018, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/when-god-withholds-something-good.
3. Jonathan Edwards, "The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards," Desiring God, December 30, 2006, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-resolutions-of-jonathan-edwards.https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-resolutions-of-jonathan-edwards.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 32, DDG)

76. Glorification

Glorification is the final stage in the process of salvation. It refers to the future time when a Christian reaches moral and spiritual perfection at the time of death or at Christ's return (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:22). Glorification also involves the physical perfection that we will have once our bodies have been resurrected. When we are glorified, we will have a fuller knowledge and understanding of God and His Word (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Cor. 13:12).

TEACHING PLAN

▪ How can our past distract us from the race we need to run in the present?

Paul encouraged the church to forget what is behind and reach forward to what is ahead (v. 13). We often spend too much time looking in the rearview mirror of life. Crippled by the guilt and shame of the past or impressed by our past successes, we can get off course in the present. Past successes will not secure future victories, and past failures do not define your future. Keep pressing ahead and living for Jesus one day at a time, with the finish line in mind.

Read Philippians 3:15-21.

Maturity is not about age; rather, it is a mindset. Is your mind set on knowing and living for Christ? Is your mind committed to heavenly priorities and the glory that is coming? These things are the essence of Christian maturity. When your mind has been shaped by the values of the kingdom over the values of this world, your life will be different. You will imitate godly examples and press on toward the prize as you eagerly await your Savior's return.

▪ What steps can you take to grow in Christian maturity?

The first thing we can do is commit ourselves to learning the truth. We cannot live up to a truth we do not know (v. 16), so develop a hunger for learning the Scriptures. We also need godly examples in our lives. Every Christian needs living, breathing examples to follow. The apostles are great examples, but you need some people alive today that you can look up to who are imitating the apostolic lifestyle (v. 17). If you haven't already, consider reaching out to someone older than you who you've noticed running toward God and asking them to be your mentor.

▪ What are two motivations to live for Christ in verses 19-21?

Paul gave the Philippians a severe warning about people who reject Christ – "their end is destruction" (v. 19). Whatever enjoyment may come from taking the easy road and not living for Christ, it will not last. Those who are "focused on earthly things" (v. 19) will be destroyed. The moral of the story is that sin is never worth it, but a second motivation is that our Savior is coming with rescue and reward. He will transform our bodies from death to life and trade our shame for glory. This hope, this heavenly prize, makes the cost of following Jesus worth everything.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus is the greatest treasure and reward.

Philippians 3:15-21

"*Whose end is destruction*: He adds this in order that the Philippians, appalled by the danger, may be so much the more carefully on their guard, that they may not involve themselves in the ruin of those persons."[4]

"If you are a believer in Christ, you do not have to wait for the second coming of Christ to know where your home is: heaven or hell. When you trust Christ, your name is sealed on the citizen roles of heaven."[5]

"*Who will transform our vile body* — Into the most perfect state, and the most beauteous form. It will then be purer than the unspotted firmament, brighter than the lustre of the stars and, which exceeds all parallel, which comprehends all perfection, like unto his glorious body - Like that wonderfully glorious body which he wears in his heavenly kingdom, and on his triumphant throne."[6]

Activity

Ask students to form three groups; each group corresponds to one of the three points of today's lesson. Each group should come up with a short list (5-6 items) of examples of each point: the first group will come up with a list of hindrances in our Christian race; the second group will come up with a list of goals toward which we press; the third group will come up with a list of victories we keep in mind.

Once they've made their list, ask them to share them verbally with the rest of the group. Next (this part you can do as a large group or in small groups), ask them to consider how each list relates to others. For example:

- How do our hindrances (first group) prevent us from achieving our goals (second group)?
- How does pressing toward our goals (second) help us put aside hindrances (first group)?
- How do our hindrances (first group) prevent us from holding victory mindsets (third group)?
- How does holding a victory mindset (third group) help us put aside hindrances (first group)?
- How does pressing toward Christian goals (second group) help us focus on victory (third group)?
- How does focusing on victory (third group) help us press toward our goals (second group)?

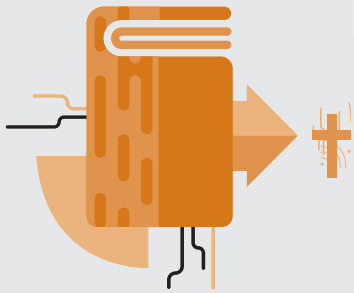
4. John Calvin, "Philippians 3 Commentary - John Calvin's Commentaries on the Bible," StudyLight.org, accessed December 15, 2020, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/philippians-3.html.

5. John Piper, "All Things Subject to the Risen Christ," Desiring God, March 27, 2005, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/all-things-subject-to-the-risen-christ.

6. John Wesley, "Philippians 3 Commentary - Wesley's Explanatory Notes," StudyLight.org, accessed December 15, 2020, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/wen/philippians-3.html.

(p. 33, DDG) Christ Connection

The apostle Paul described life in Christ as running a race in which we press on toward the goal of fully knowing Jesus as we hope in the final victory of our glorified bodies. Our perseverance in the race reminds us of Jesus and His endurance of the cross, which provided forgiveness of our sins and salvation.



PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL

Philippians 3:7-21

PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL

Jesus is the greatest treasure and reward.

JESUS CONNECTION

The apostle Paul described living God's way like running a race so that we gain the ultimate prize: fully knowing Jesus, being with God forever and receiving new, perfect bodies one day. Our perseverance in the race reminds us of Jesus and His endurance of the cross, which provided forgiveness of our sins and salvation.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

SACRIFICE – Giving of myself to help someone else.

HEAD

What was Paul willing to let go of in order to "gain Christ"?

What was Paul's goal in life? Why?

HEART

What is something you have given up in order to gain something better? Why was what you gained worth the sacrifice?

Why is it so hard to see all our successes, or "gains," in life as something to let go of (Phil. 3:7), and to consider knowing Jesus to be the greatest thing we could gain (Phil. 3:8)?

HANDS

Choosing to sacrifice is hard, but it can be easier to sacrifice when we focus on what we gain instead of what we are giving up. Fill in the chart below by listing what we have to give up (first column) and what we might gain (second column) in each situation. Ask God to change your heart to be willing to sacrifice like Jesus did and to help you focus on the benefits, instead of the costs, when you are called to sacrifice.

Situation	What will it cost?	What will you gain?
You take a summer job doing yard work for your elderly neighbor every week.		
You challenge yourself to read the entire Bible in a year.		
(Your situation):		